

A Formal Letter Addressing Concerns and Demands On Behalf Of The Students Of Crosstown High School

To Alexis Gwen-Miller, other members of Crosstown High administration, members of the board, and whomever else it may concern, we as the Crosstown High student body are exercising our constitutional right to protest and using this opportunity to formally voice our concerns.

We love our school, and this comes from a place of determination to see Crosstown High succeed. But we feel as if our voices are not being heard, so we're not giving you any choice but to listen.

One of the fundamental principles that this school was founded on is student voice and choice, but since the beginning of this school year we have had no control over changes being made to our education. Students have repeatedly voiced our concerns to administration and our voices have been repeatedly ignored. There are numerous issues, which we will express fully in this letter, that have lead to us as students feeling that Crosstown is not fulfilling its promise to give us a project based, competency based, relationship driven, diverse by design, education.

The first issue we would like to address is the school's shift towards traditional learning styles and away from individualized competency based learning. We opted to attend a competency based school because we didn't want something traditional, if we wanted to go memorize content for common core standards and have our worth measured by test scores we would go to one of the many traditional options available. What we want at Crosstown, and what was originally promised to us, is competency based grades and individual learning plans that meet students at the level they're at. Learning should be set up in a way that meets us as individual students where we are, if a student is above grade level work and they're taking initiative and doing the work, they should be allowed to excel and get credit for it. If a student needs extra time and help to understand a concept, or is falling behind, they should be able to get the extra help they need.

This brings up the issue of the grading scale. Our recent report cards absolutely horribly reflected students' academic achievement. Students who are obviously doing extremely well in their classes and who by competency based standards are well beyond mastery in certain subject areas, received failing grades. One failing grade on a report card may not matter to you, and as much as I wish it didn't matter to us, the reality in our society is that our grades affect everything. Our high school transcripts affect what colleges we get into, and in turn dictate a lot about our future. Not only that but on an individual level report cards affect a student's home life, and in turn their self worth and mental stability. A majority of us have not seen competencies being used to assess us in class, and this is not the fault of the teachers. Our grading scale has almost completely shifted to that of a traditional highschool and competency based mastery assessments only account for 40% of our grade when it should be 100%.

It's not just how our learning is being assessed that's the problem, but the curriculum we're being forced to take part in. The entirety of the 10th grade is taking an environmental science class where all we've "learned" is the movement of tectonic plates, the layers of earth's atmosphere, and the rock cycle. This is the content we all learned in middle school. Last year we all took biology and it was our understanding and expectation that this year we would take chemistry, with the possibility of a physics course. But instead of taking a rigorous, or even grade level science course, we're all being lectured on content from the 7th grade. Additionally, every single sophomore is taking Algebra II. Last year, some of us took Algebra I and others took Geometry. The students who were in the upper level geometry class last year were the only ones supposed to progress to Algebra II, those of us who took Algebra I were supposed to continue to Geometry. Due to something unknown to us, everyone from Algebra I just skipped the entire year of geometry, and will have to take it their junior year. This confusing course selection just furthers the notion that Crosstown is straying further away from individualized learning. We should have courses offered that align with students' needs and ability, we shouldn't just be stuck with classes that either don't challenge us or are beyond our skill level just because of a mistake on the school's part. Furthermore we're supposed to have some sort of choice in the courses we take.

Possibly as a combined result of the frustrating core curriculum, a misunderstanding due to lack of communication from administration, and additional isolated concerns, students are worried that we won't have all the credits we need to graduate. Crosstown requires 25 credits to graduate (whereas the state of Tennessee requires 22) but certain students have raised concerns that at the current rate we might not even meet the lower benchmark.

The main issue that has sparked most of the current collective frustration of the student body, is the cohort model. Fundamentally there is nothing wrong with the idea behind the current cohort model. The issue is in how it's being implemented. There is an unfair distribution of students between the two 10th grade cohorts that, whether intentionally or not, limits diversity in both cohorts. A large majority of black and minority students in the 10th grade are in cohort B, where as most of the white students are in cohort A. Many of the students in 10B feel that 10A has far more privilege in terms of academic opportunities and structure. Due to the fact that cohort B holds most of the minority and black students, this seems, whether done intentionally or not, to reflect bias. Whether this was intentional or not is besides the point. Another fundamental principle of Crosstown High is that it's meant to be "diverse by design." The fact that either the school deliberately segregated its students, or ignored race as a factor in splitting up the cohorts creating an unintentional lack of diversity, proves that the school obviously isn't fulfilling its original mission of designing a racially and culturally diverse classroom experience.

(paragraph about 10B's learning structure issues)

It is becoming increasingly obvious that we have a need for change here at Crosstown High. Students and parents have repeatedly threatened to leave the school because they don't feel

confident that they're getting the learning experience necessary for success. We have explicitly expressed our concerns, so the question remains: how do we move forward?

We as students are willing to work with the school to improve our learning experience, in fact we demand to have a voice in any future changes made. We have several proposed solutions, which constitute our list of demands.

- a. Two non-voting student representative positions (one male, one female) on the board of trustees. These students would be democratically elected by the student body and the only requirements for these positions are that the students must be upperclassman (a member of any grade, excluding freshman) and must maintain a GPA of 3.5 or higher.
- b. A group of students (whose names are listed below) who will work with administrators to create solutions to the problems we have listed above, until an official student government election can be held.
- c. A promise from the leadership at Crosstown High, that from now forward student voice will no longer be ignored. Once student government (and the student representatives on the board) are elected, those positions have to mean something. As a school that preaches about valuing student voice, we want a guarantee that the school will work with students to ensure that we have a significant influence on the current and future experience at Crosstown High.

We are giving a month from today's date, or until October 20th, for these demands to be implemented and for the students at Crosstown High to see evidence of change. If the school continues to ignore our concerns, the collective student body will organize a strike. If no students show up to school, the school can't run. We refuse to continue to attend a school that hypocritically ignores the fundamental principles that it was founded on and continues to falsely advertise.

Temporary Student Advocacy Committee

Students proposed for the temporary committee willing to work with administration to come up with solutions for the school:

Sasha Glass-Broom

Lydia Grace

Sadie Grant

Sara Grisanti

Harper Kolehmainen

Leo Martinez

Jayna West